

“Farming Memories” is an archive designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Isle of Wight’s Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation in 1963. The archive, a collection of sound recordings and photographs, has been gathered by Natural Enterprise on behalf of the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. Contributors include farmers, farm workers and people with fond memories of the Island’s wonderful countryside.

The archive has enabled us to produce a number stories relating to farming on the Island in the last 50 years.

Dairy Farming



Bridlesford Lodge Farm 1996, kindly contributed, Dickie Griffin

In 1963 most of the farms in the AONB were mixed, and would have small herds of dairy cows. Since then farmers have either increased their herd size, or in most cases they have sold the cows and are no longer milking.



*Dennis Phillips Compton Farm, 1970s,
Kindly contributed Jane Phillips*

When the AONB was designated, farmers were putting churns roadside to be collected by truck. This changed in the '70s to collection by bulk tank. Increasing herd sizes and more advanced milking equipment meant that old farm buildings were no longer suitable, and farmyards saw the arrival of large industrial looking barns in the '70s, '80s and '90s. The Island was often at the forefront of technology, and one of our farmers had interest from as far away as South America in his new rotary parlour which allowed him to milk 300 cows. Larger herds and tougher environmental regulations also led to the building of silage clamps and slurry pits. However the potential cost of up-grading machinery led to many of our farmers deciding to leave the business.

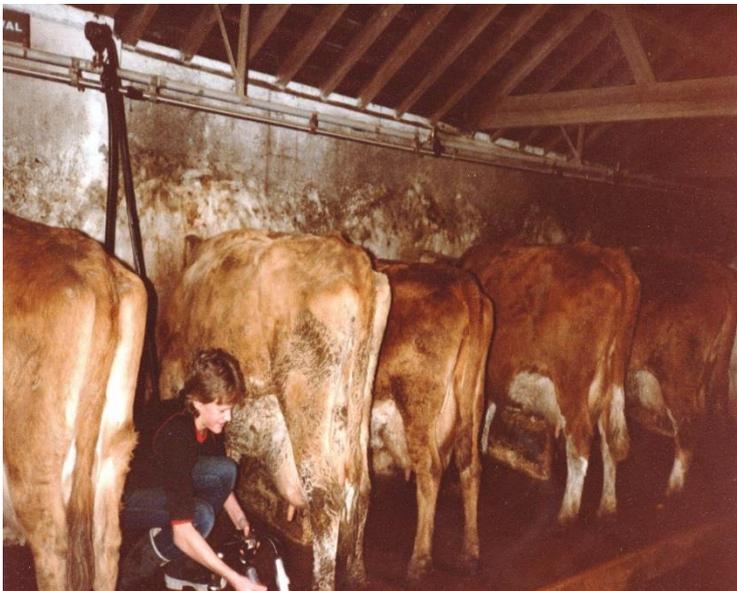


50 Years of Farming Memories in the Isle of Wight AONB



And it's not just the building and machinery that have changed; the breeds of animals and food are different too. Friesians and Friesian crosses were often replaced by Holsteins. We were told *"The cows today would be a foot taller (than 1963)"*. In the 1960's kale was the preferred fodder and was grown on farm. The '70s and '80s saw the arrival of maize, a super-food for cattle.

The arrival of milk quotas in the 1980's came as a real blow to our farmers, many of whom were in the process of increasing their herd size. Then followed the demise of the Milk Marketing Board, a drastic drop in milk prices, and the banning of live animal exports to the continent in the 1990s also drove farmers out of the business. One farmer said *"After moving into this building we found our milk price had dropped from 30p to 19p per litre"* Another said *"It was awful when we sold the cows ... the future did not look very promising"*



There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of dairy herds on the Island since 1963, but it does not follow that the amount of milk the Island produces fell similarly. Science plays a major part and is applied to both breeding and feeding. One farmer told us that his milk yield increased from about 2000 litres per cow to between 8000 and 9000 litres per cow, when he left the dairy industry in 2004. Given the increase in production, and increase in size of the remaining herds, it may be that we still produce as much milk as we did in 1963, but with a fraction of the number of farms.

Old Milking Parlour, Briddlesford Lodge Farm, kindly contributed, Dickie Griffin

Further details of the Farming Memories Project can be found on the Natural Enterprise Website (www.naturalenterprise.co.uk) and the AONB website (www.wightaonb.org.uk).